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The Athletic / Blue Jackets' brutal injury wave makes ugly loss to Capitals seem secondary

By Aaron Portzline – November 24, 2025

The day started poorly for the Columbus Blue Jackets. It ended worse. And the 5-1 loss to the Washington Capitals on Monday in Capital One Arena, matching the Jackets' most lopsided loss this season, wasn't the lowlight.

During the morning skate, the Blue Jackets' most consistent and productive forward, Kirill Marchenko, limped off the ice after a part of his lower body "tightened up on him," GM Don Waddell said.

Mathieu Olivier, the Blue Jackets' most physical forward and a key member of their checking line, went off the ice late in the first period shaking his head after an awkward but innocent collision in the corner with Capitals defenseman John Carlson.

When the third period started, defenseman Zach Werenski, the quarterback of their offensive attack and one of the league's top blueliners, with a Norris Trophy nomination last season, did not emerge from the dressing room with the rest of his teammates.

Waddell said he didn't think Marchenko's injury would be a long-term absence. But an update will not be available for Werenski and Olivier, Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason said, until the Blue Jackets are back home on Tuesday.

"Nothing, obviously, right now," Evason told reporters in Washington, D.C. "It's too early. You guys know both of those players, and if they leave the game, then it's, uh ... it's not positive, that's for sure."

Werenski, Marchenko and Olivier are among the most important, impactful players on the ice and in the dressing room. That's why the final result of Monday's game seemed almost a secondary concern.

The Blue Jackets' season already is off to a choppy start. But if those three miss any time, along with the continued absences of forward Boone Jenner and defenseman Erik Gudbranson, the hill gets dramatically steeper.

Monday's loss dropped the Blue Jackets to 1-4-1 against the Metropolitan Division, a big reason they sit in seventh place this morning, having been jumped by the Capitals.

"Yeah, those are key players, of course," center Charlie Coyle said. "We have to bring ... it's our sense of urgency, being on the toes more. It felt like we were kind of just out there at times. They have the puck and they're getting bounces because they're doing the right things. We just ... it just wasn't the way we (should have) played. That wasn't it."

Washington took a 1-0 lead only 6:05 into the game, when defenseman Jakob Chychrun jumped on a loose puck and blasted it past Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins.

It marked the 20th time in 238 starts, according to the NHL's stats department, that Merzlikins has allowed a goal on the opponent's first shot. Merzlikins stopped 26 of 31 shots, but he was not the Blue Jackets' issue on this night.

The Capitals scored three times in the final 3:31 of the second period to turn a tight 1-0 game into a 4-0 laughter. That includes two goals in the span of 12 seconds, the second clearing Merzlikins with only three seconds remaining on the second-period clock.

"If we went into the second intermission 1-0, it's obviously a tighter game and anything could happen," defenseman Ivan Provorov said. "But when you go into a second intermission down four goals, it's tough to come back."

The lead was 5-0 early in the third before defenseman Denton Mateychuk scored to avoid the Blue Jackets' first shutout loss of the season. The four-goal margin matched losses earlier this season to the Calgary Flames (Nov. 5) and Washington (Oct. 24).

With Marchenko's injury apparent in the morning, the Blue Jackets had time to adjust their lineup. Forward Yegor Chinakhov, who has been in and out of the lineup all season, went back in with a choice assignment, replacing Marchenko on the No. 1 line with center Adam Fantilli and winger Dimitri Voronkov. That line, with Marchenko, has been one of the best in the NHL this season and has carried most of the weight offensively for Columbus this season.

But it cratered on Monday. Fantilli, Voronkov and Chinkahov each had no points and minus-3 rankings. They were on the ice for two of the Capitals' three goals at the end of the second period that iced the game.

The Columbus Dispatch / Injuries catch up to Blue Jackets in loss to Capitals: takeaways

By Brian Hedger – November 25, 2025

The Blue Jackets' injury luck was already teetering when they headed to their morning skate Nov. 24 in Washington, D.C.

Heading back to Columbus after losing three key players, one before and two during a 5-1 blowout loss to the Washington Capitals at Capital One Arena, the Jackets' luck has run out.

Across the NHL, teams have watched key players drop with stunning regularity over the first quarter of an 82-game season that's compressed on around the league's scheduled pause in February for the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy. The Blue Jackets largely avoided a large swath of injuries, but that's no longer the case.

Kirill Marchenko, Zach Werenski and Mathieu Olivier are now dealing with upper-body injuries that prevented Marchenko from suiting up and forced the other two to exit early against the Capitals. Marchenko is dealing with muscle that tightened up during the Jackets' morning skate, which could be a shorter-term issue, but less was made public about the other two guys.

Marchenko and Werenski are the Blue Jackets' top two scorers, while Olivier is their biggest source of physical play as a power forward on their most effective line. All three will get further medical attention on Nov. 25 in Columbus, but Blue Jackets coach Dean Evason sounded concerned when asked for any updates on Werenski and Olivier following the game.

"Both, obviously, left the game ... and if they left the game, then it's not positive, that's for sure," he said. "But we'll evaluate (in Columbus) and see where we're at."

After concluding another long road trip, the Blue Jackets finish November with home games Nov. 26 against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Nov. 27 against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Columbus now has five injured regulars to assess, including captain Boone Jenner and defenseman Erik Gudbranson on injured reserve. Things could get rocky in a hurry for the Blue Jackets (11-9-3), who are now sixth in the Metropolitan Division after being passed by the Capitals (12-9-2).

Here are four more takeaways:

Columbus Blue Jackets melt down against Washington Capitals again

Just as they did Oct. 24 in Columbus, the Blue Jackets came apart at the seams against the Capitals after playing them close to start out. In Columbus, John Carlson scored late in the second period to give Washington a 1-0 lead that sparked a 5-1 blowout win.

This time, the Jackets' meltdown happened on three straight Capitals goals in the final 3:31 of the second. The Blue Jackets have only lost by multiple goals five times in their first 23 games, and the Capitals are responsible for two of them.

"I don't think we really got to our game," center Charlie Coyle told reporters in Washington. "I don't think we gave ourselves a good enough chance, and you can't win games like that in this league."

Columbus Blue Jackets forward Yegor Chinakhov struggles as Kirill Marchenko's replacement

After a brief promotion to the Blue Jackets' second line that lasted only one game, Yegor Chinakhov caught an unexpected elevator going back up in the lineup.

Marchenko's injury created a need for a forward with top six skills to play with Adam Fantilli and Dmitri Voronkov on the top line, so Chinakhov got the call. It's been a challenging season for him after a summer trade request, prompting Chinakhov to mostly languish while skating limited ice times or sitting as a healthy scratch.

Things worsened against the Capitals.

Chinakhov skated 16:03, but his line didn't generate any goals and three forwards finished with -3 ratings. Chinakhov was caught flat-footed, screening his own goalie, when Carlson scored off a one-timer with three seconds left in the second period. Tough night.

Elvis Merzlikins has another tough night for Columbus Blue Jackets

Elvis Merzlikins was tagged with all five Capitals goals while starting for just the second time in the past nine games. He also allowed five goals in a loss Nov. 18 in Winnipeg to conclude a taxing back-to-back that began with Jet Greaves starting Nov. 17 at Nationwide Arena in a 4-3 shootout win over the Montreal Canadiens.

After alternating the season's first 15 starts between Merzlikins and Greaves, Evason and his coaching staff have leaned heavily on Greaves since Nov. 10 in Edmonton. Greaves, expectedly, has settled into a rhythm and looks solid while Merzlikins looks a bit rusty with more down time between starts.

Merzlikins also dealt with an illness during a road trip to Western Canada and Seattle that may have contributed to Greaves getting the lion's share of games.

Columbus Blue Jackets add defensive depth by signing Brendan Smith

After watching veteran defenseman Brendan Smith start the season in the AHL with the Cleveland Monsters, the Blue Jackets signed him Nov. 24 to a one-year, two-way contract.

Smith, 36, will join the team officially Nov. 25 in Columbus during an off day for the Blue Jackets. He could step right into the lineup Nov. 26 against Toronto if Werenski can't play.

Smith will play his 15th NHL season after spending the first 14 with the Detroit Red Wings, New York Rangers, New Jersey Devils, Carolina Hurricanes and Dallas Stars.

The Columbus Dispatch / Columbus Blue Jackets fall apart against Washington Capitals again

By Brian Hedger – November 25, 2025

The Blue Jackets are heading back from a four-game road trip decimated by injuries and smarting after a second blowout loss to the Washington Capitals this season.

Losing three lineup stalwarts Nov. 24 at Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C., including leading scorer Kirill Marchenko at the morning skate, the Blue Jackets fell flat against the Capitals by a 5-1 score for the second time in a month.

The Capitals (12-9-2) also routed the Jackets 5-1 on Oct. 24 at Nationwide Arena in Columbus in a game that was tightly contested until the third period. This one got away from the Blue Jackets (11-9-3) late in the second, when they allowed three goals in the final 3:31 of the period to trail 4-0 starting the third.

Mathieu Olivier left the Jackets' lineup late in the first with an upper-body injury and didn't return, and star defenseman Zach Werenski joined him in the training room after the second period with an upper-body injury that ended his night.

The Blue Jackets are already playing without captain Boone Jenner (upper body) and defenseman Erik Gudbranson (hip), who are each on injured reserve.

Jakob Chychrun led the way for the Capitals with two goals, while John Carlson and Tom Wilson added a goal and assist each. Defenseman Martin Fehervary also scored a goal, and Justin Sourdif added two assists for Washington, which had 10 players finish with at least one point.

Denton Mateychuk scored the lone goal for the Blue Jackets, who started goalie Elvis Merzlikins (26 saves) for the second time in the past nine games. Capitals goalie Logan Thompson (22 saves) notched his second win of the season over Columbus.

The Hockey Writers / Every NHL Team's Standout Prospect in 2025-26

By Jordan Orth – November 24, 2025

With the 2025-26 season in full swing at not just the NHL level, but across the hockey world itself, fans have gotten to get a look at their favorite teams' prospects. Whether it's just from highlights or being able to actually watch games, there have been plenty of prospects for NHL organizations who have stood out so far in their respective seasons.

*** All statistics are as of Nov. 22***

Anaheim Ducks- W Herman Träff

Part of the Brian Dumoulin trade at the 2025 Trade Deadline from the New Jersey Devils, Herman Träff is in the midst of his first full season in Sweden's second-tier professional league, HockeyAllsvenskan, with IK Oskarshamn. The 2024 third-round pick has put his offensive game on full display, placing himself in the top five in the league in scoring, and has shown that he is more than capable of handling the professional game. He continues to utilize his large body to his advantage at both ends of the ice, complemented by his heavy and lethal shot. Träff has had a great start.

NHL Rumours Nov. 22: Senators Eye Home Run Trade, Canucks Trading Reichel & Sharks Remain Sellers

The return to HockeyAllsvenskan from the Swedish Hockey League (SHL), where he averaged less than 10 minutes of ice time a night, might have been the best decision for the young forward. Träff's development and game could lead him to being a bottom-six player in the NHL at some point in his career.

Other standouts: W Austin Burnevik, W Emile Guite, D Tarin Smith

Boston Bruins- W Cooper Simpson

The Bruins have a handful of prospects who have had strong starts this season, but 2025 third-round pick Cooper Simpson stands out above the rest. In his first full season in the United States Hockey League (USHL), Simpson has put his entire game on display. What stands out the most is his puck-handling and playmaking abilities. He has the wherewithal to get himself into a position to make a great play in the offensive zone with the puck on his stick. Whether that be finding a teammate or using the quick release he has with his shot, he has been an offensive threat so far for the Youngstown Phantoms.

He currently sits second in the USHL in points, and he possesses all the tools to elevate his game to an even higher level in due time.

Other standouts: C/W Cole Chandler, C/W James Hagens, W Kirill Yemelyanov

Buffalo Sabres- W Melvin Novotny

The Sabres have seen a handful of late-round draft picks have strong starts to their 2025-26 seasons, but none has been quite as impressive as one of their 2025 seventh-round picks, Melvin Novotny. Novotny came over from Sweden this season to play in the USHL for the Muskegon Lumberjacks and has adapted well to the North American style of play. To this point, he has found a solid balance in being a playmaker and goal-scorer, tallying 11 goals and 12 assists.

Novotny has a knack for finding himself around the puck whenever he is on the ice, and when he does have the puck, his patience, combined with his shooting ability, makes him a threat on all levels.

Other standouts: C Konsta Helenius, G Ryerson Leenders, W Ryan Ruckinski

Calgary Flames- W Matvei Gridin

A player who has played in three leagues over the last three seasons, while producing greatly, Matvei Gridin made his professional debut this season and has been playing at a point-per-game pace for the Flames' American Hockey League (AHL) affiliate, the Calgary Wranglers. Gridin has put his all-around two-way game on display in his first professional season and has been great at both ends of the ice. Where his game continues to improve is in his playmaking. He has seen four games of action with the Flames, tallying a single point. He should be on the short list of call-ups when the time comes for the organization.

Other standouts: RW Hunter Laing, C Yan Matveiko, G Kirill Zarubin

Carolina Hurricanes- C Charlie Cerrato

While much of the attention and hype (and rightfully so) has been towards projected top-three pick in the 2026 Draft, Gavin McKenna, at Penn State University, one of the Hurricanes' prospects has stuck out this season for the Nittany Lions, and that is Charlie Cerrato. A second-round pick in the 2025 Draft by the Hurricanes, Cerrato has been an assist machine for Penn State so far this season, racking up 16 through 15 games. He has shown a strong willingness and capability to play a two-way game from his center position.

If Cerrato's goal-scoring can begin to match his assist numbers, he could be in for a big season for a Penn State team looking to make a push for a National Championship this season.

Other standouts: W Jayden Perron, W Alexander Perevalov, W Felix Unger Sörum

Chicago Blackhawks- W Roman Kantserov

A second-round pick by the Blackhawks in the 2022 Draft, Roman Kantserov, is on pace for a potential record-breaking season in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) this season. As a 21-year-old, Kantserov finds himself at the top of the KHL in goal-scoring, with 19. When he was drafted, he was known more as a playmaker, but he has developed his goal-scoring ability to become an all-around threat in the offensive zone, as he has become a goal-scoring threat from anywhere. He continues not to let his size be a downfall in his game, standing at 5-foot-9. His KHL contract is set to expire at the end of the 2025-26 season, and he could be in line to sign his entry-level contract (ELC) with the Blackhawks sooner rather than later.

Other standouts: W Nathan Behm, G Adam Gajan, W Nick Lardis

Colorado Avalanche- RW Christian Humphreys

A team that does not have the deepest pipeline is headlined by a seventh-round pick, Christian Humphreys. A 2024 draft pick of the Avalanche, Humphreys has ridden a strong second half of the season with the Kitchener Rangers last season into a bigger role in his first full season in the OHL. He made the jump to Kitchener mid-season from the University of Michigan and became an immediate impact player.

Humphreys has no hesitation to go to the dirty areas of the ice and has been one of the Rangers' most consistent offensive players to this point in the season. For a team looking to make a push for an OHL Championship and a Memorial Cup spot, a player like Humphreys is going to be key, and he could find himself garnering more attention as the season goes on.

Other standouts: C Max Curran, G Ilya Nabokov, G Isak Posch

Columbus Blue Jackets- C Owen Griffin

After a breakout second half and playoffs in his draft-year season last season, [Owen Griffin](#) surprisingly slid to the fifth round for the Columbus Blue Jackets to take. He has taken the momentum from last season and turned it into another strong season to this point with the Oshawa Generals of the OHL. After seeing the Generals lose Beckett Sennecke to the NHL (Anaheim Ducks), Griffin has taken on an even bigger role in the Generals' lineup, leading the team in goals (12) and points (23).

While on the smaller side (170 pounds), Griffin has no problem with being involved in the physical aspect of the game and is a nonstop pest and energizer on the ice. He may not develop into a full-blown NHLer in his career, but he has the potential to be a valuable piece for the organization at the AHL level and could have an outside chance of becoming a bottom-six player in the league if things work out as hoped.

Other standouts: G Evan Gardner, D Jackson Smith, RW William Whitelaw

Dallas Stars- RW Cameron Schmidt

Had it not been for the knock on his size (5-foot-8, 161 pounds), Cameron Schmidt would have heard his name called a lot earlier than the third round in the 2025 Draft. Schmidt has the speed and goal-scoring ability to light up the score sheet, and that has been on full display this season again for the Vancouver Giants of the WHL. To this point, he has tallied 15 goals and is on pace to top last season's total of 40. But where Schmidt's game has taken another step forward in his ability to play in every situation. He has played on the penalty kill, power play, and plenty in five-on-five situations this season as he looks to round out his entire game.

Other standouts: LW Jaxon Fuder, G Måns Goos, LW Brandon Gorzynski

Detroit Red Wings- C Max Plante

An organization with one of the deepest pipelines in the NHL and an AHL affiliate off to a strong start, the Detroit Red Wings have seen several prospects have great seasons to date. But Max Plante, a 2024 second-round pick, has taken his offensive game to another level at the University of Minnesota-Duluth this season. He leads the entire NCAA in points (by three over his brother and Pittsburgh Penguins prospect Zam Plante). His all-around game has really come together, thanks to his nonstop work ethic and motor, and he consistently does the little things right to help his team out.

If Plante can continue to produce and play like he has to this point, he could easily find himself in the middle of the Hobey Baker (top collegiate player) discussion come the end of the season, while also supplanting himself as another player who could become a part of the Red Wings' future. He will certainly be in line for a spot on the United States' World Junior Championship roster as well.

Other standouts: G Trey Augustine, LW Dmitri Buchelnikov, G Sebastian Cossa, RW Brent Solomon

Edmonton Oilers- C Tommy Lafrenière

One of the Oilers' newest prospects, Tommy Lafrenière, was a third-round pick by the organization in the 2025 Draft and has had a great start to his second full season with the Kamloops Blazers of the WHL. When watching him play, one of the biggest differences between last season and this one is the pace at which he plays the game. He plays with great pace, and it has helped lead his development all-around. He has taken on a significant role with the Blazers so far and has put up 28 points in just 23 games this season. If he can continue to develop at the rate he already has, he will make a major impact on a pipeline that is not full of top-end talent.

Other standouts: W Quinn Hutson, LW David Lewandowski, W Viljami Marjala

Florida Panthers- LW Shea Busch

Originally, the player I was going to go with here was Jack Devine, but he recently earned his NHL call-up. The Panthers do not have a deep pipeline, but a few prospects have got off to strong starts this season. Included in that group is 2025 fourth-round pick, Shea Busch. Busch was known for his power-forward style, with his size and physicality, but he has taken his offensive game to another level in his first full season in the WHL with the Everett Silvertips. On top of that, his overall skating ability has improved, helping his all-around game. After a strong playoffs with the Silvertips, he has ridden that momentum into almost a point-per-game pace this season.

Other standouts: G Denis Gabdrakhmanov, D Vladislav Lukashevich, W Stepan Zvyagin

Los Angeles Kings- C Jimmy Lombardi

After sliding to the fourth round of the 2025 Draft in parts due to his struggles to find consistency offensively, Jimmy Lombardi has had a breakout season for the Flint Firebirds of the OHL. While a prospect like Liam Greentree could easily be thought of as the Kings' standout prospect, Lombardi has taken his game to another level than he has previously shown. He has been everywhere on the ice and has made an impact in every aspect of the game so far for the Firebirds. He is currently on pace to

shatter his best season productivity-wise and is a big reason the Firebirds are off to the strong start they are.

Other standouts: G Carter George, RW Liam Greentree, D Jared Woolley

Minnesota Wild- C Adam Benák

After being one of Czechia's most consistent players on the international stage the past few years, Adam Benák had a busy offseason. First, he was drafted by the Wild in the fourth round of the 2025 Draft, and then was picked by the Brantford Bulldogs in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) Import Draft. He has made the transition to North American hockey look seamless. On a Bulldogs roster full of NHL-drafted players, Benák has averaged almost two points per game and has been an offensive force for his team. The biggest knock on him has always been his size, but so far in the OHL, he has shown he has the skill and ability to be a high-end producer despite it.

Other standouts: C Carter Klippenstein, RW Ryder Ritchie, W Charlie Stramel

Montréal Canadiens- D Bryce Pickford

While prospects like Michael Hage and Alexander Zharovsky have both had great starts to their seasons, the prospect who has stuck out the most in my eyes within the Canadiens' system has been Bryce Pickford. After being passed over in his first year of draft eligibility in 2024, Pickford returned to the Medicine Hat Tigers of the WHL and played a great season, helping them reach the Memorial Cup. He rolled that momentum into being picked by the Canadiens in the third round of the 2025 Draft.

This season, he has taken the reins as captain of the Tigers and has elevated his offensive game, helping him match his solid defensive play. Pickford has the tools to become a mid-round pick that works out well for the Canadiens.

Other standouts: F Filip Eriksson, C Michael Hage, RW Alexander Zharovsky

Nashville Predators- C Yegor Surin

As a 19-year-old in the KHL, the Predators' 2024 first-round pick, Yegor Surin, has had a breakout season to this point. He plays a style of game much like another Predators prospect, Brady Martin. Both players constantly move around the ice and are looking to make a play at both ends of the ice. His offensive production this far has been outstanding, putting up 22 points in 29 games. Playing alongside former Predator Alexander Radulov, Surin has dominated the play anytime he has been on the ice and should give Predators fans plenty of hope and excitement.

Other standouts: G Jack Ivankovic, C Brady Martin, D Cameron Reid

New Jersey Devils- D Daniil Orlov

Viewed more as a defensive defenseman when he was drafted in 2022, Daniil Orlov has seen his offensive game continue to develop in the KHL, garnering the attention of many. He has taken over the number one defenseman role for Spartak Moskva, playing over 20 minutes a night and becoming the

power-play “quarterback”. His puck-moving and all-around offensive game have looked great to start his third full season in the KHL.

Devils fans will have a bit of time before they have the chance to see Orlov in the NHL, though, as his KHL contract is not set to expire until 2028.

Other standouts: G Trenten Bennett, C Gustav Hillstrom

New York Islanders- D Kashawn Aitcheson

Known for his physicality and bone-crushing hits, Kashawn Aitcheson was an intriguing prospect heading into the 2025 Draft. He had shown flashes of being a high-end offensive player from his defenseman spot, while also having a strong defensive game. But this season, he has taken that to another level, leading all OHL defensemen in goals with 15 (as of Nov. 22, he is the only defenseman to reach double-digits). He continues to be a menace on the ice defensively as well.

With the further development of his all-around game, there is a strong chance that the Islanders are going to have the best draft class of any team from the 2025 Draft, which included Matthew Schaefer at number one, Viktor Eklund at number 16 and Aitcheson at number 17.

Other standouts: G Dmitri Gamzin, RW Jacob Kvasincka, LW Tomas Poletin

New York Rangers- W Nathan Aspinall

After an impressive training camp and preseason with the Rangers, 2024 fifth-round pick Nathan Aspinall earned his entry-level contract (ELC) from the organization and has ridden the momentum he built with the Rangers back in the OHL with the Flint Firebirds. Longside Kings prospect Jimmy Lombardi, Aspinall has elevated his offensive game this season and has been one of the OHL’s more impressive players. He has become more than a big body in front of the net and has used his body to his advantage when handling the puck, becoming a threat at all times.

Overall, his offensive numbers have taken a step in the right direction, already tallying 12 goals, 16 assists and 28 points in just 19 games played. The improvements in his game truly stick out and make him a prospect to keep an eye on for Rangers fans.

Other standouts: F Raoul Boilard, C Mikkel Eriksen, RW Gabe Perreault

Ottawa Senators- C Owen Beckner

He may not come with hype or fanfare as some of the other prospects in the Ottawa Senators system or league-wide, but what Owen Beckner has been able to do at Colorado College the past two seasons is impressive. As a freshman last season, he led the team in points and is doing so again this season. Beckner is in the midst of a breakout season, leading the upstart Colorado College team at over a point-per-game pace. His strong play earned him a spot on the United States Collegiate Selects team for the Spengler Cup.

Other standouts: LW Dmitri Isayev, D Carter Yakemchuk

Philadelphia Flyers- RW Porter Martone

One of the beneficiaries of the new rule allowing CHL players to play in the NCAA, Porter Martone, is off to a great start for the number one team in the NCAA, the Michigan State University Spartans. Martone has been a driving force in the top six of the Spartans' lineup, and his edginess, which he played with in the OHL, has translated well. On a team that is stocked full of talent, he has shone bright for a team that should easily compete for a National Championship at the end of the season.

Martone's overall play and production this season should not only help him be strongly considered for Canada's World Junior Championship roster, but he could find himself in the middle of the Hobey Baker race if he can continue to play at the level he has started off at.

Other standouts: C Jack Nesbitt, C Nathan Quinn, W Max Westergard

Pittsburgh Penguins- C William Horcoff

The Flyers' in-state rival has a prospect playing for an in-state rival of its own: William Horcoff at the University of Michigan. After moving to the collegiate level in the middle of the season last year, Horcoff showed his potential. But he has taken his game to another level for the Wolverines this season, becoming the go-to player in the offensive zone. He has built his game into more than just a big body who can shoot the puck, working on his skating and stickhandling.

One of the Penguins' 2025 first-round picks, Horcoff has just begun to scratch the surface of what he can become as a player. Continued production, along with further development of his all-around game, could make him a prospect who earns his way to the NHL sooner than expected. He should be on the short list of players to make the United States' WJC roster.

Other standouts: RW Jordan Charron, C Kale Dach, W Mikhail Ilyin, C Zam Plante

San Jose Sharks- C Teddy Mutryn

Making the move from the USHL and United States Developmental Program to the QMJHL has worked out great for the Sharks' third-round pick from the 2025 Draft, Teddy Mutryn. After putting up 34 points last season, he has already gotten to 22 in just 17 games with the Moncton Wildcats. He has had more multi-point games (six) than he has games where he has been held off the score sheet (five), and has taken his offensive game to another level to this point. He earned QMJHL Player of the Week honours for the week ending Nov. 10 for his strong play. With the talent already on the Sharks' NHL roster, a player like Mutryn could fill a middle-to-bottom-six role in the lineup in the future.

Other standouts: G Christian Kirsch, D Eric Pohlkamp, G Joshua Ravensbergen

Seattle Kraken- C Jake O'Brien

After putting up just shy of 100 points (98) in his draft-year season, Jake O'Brien found himself picked early on in the first round of the 2025 Draft by the Kraken. Heading into this season, the expectation was that he could continue to dominate at the OHL level with the Brantford Bulldogs, and he has done just

that. He is currently averaging just below two points a game (40 points in 21 games) and has not skipped a beat with his all-around game.

He continues to be a playmaking machine for the Bulldogs, leading the team in assists with 31 and should certainly be in the running for the Red Tilson Trophy (OHL's most outstanding player) if he can continue to produce at the level he has. He will be another player who should garner plenty of attention for a WJC roster spot with Canada as well.

Other standouts: F Julius Miettinen, W Jagger Firkus, RW Loke Krantz

St. Louis Blues- RW Justin Carbonneau

One CHL player who many thought could make the jump to the NCAA but decided to stay in the junior ranks was Justin Carbonneau. Carbonneau, a 2025 first-round pick by the Blues, has had a solid start to his season with the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada of the Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), playing at over a point-per-game average. His goal-scoring ability has been on display, while his playmaking and assist numbers are not exactly where they were last season, but it should be expected that he will reach another level as the season progresses.

Other standouts: D Lukas Fischer, D Adam Jiříček, C Matvei Korotky

Tampa Bay Lightning- F Benjamin Rautiainen

In his second full season in Liiga, Benjamin Rautiainen (2025 fourth-round pick) has taken control of the play when on the ice. He is averaging over a point per game this season and currently sits second league-wide in points. The 20-year-old looks right at home in Finland's top league and has shown plenty of offensive promise. He controls the play with his great overall patience and hockey IQ, makes the smart play more often than not, and has led the way for Tappara alongside teammate Joachim Blichfeld (league leader in points).

Other standouts: F Dylan Duke, RW Marco Mignosa, C Sam O'Reilly

Toronto Maple Leafs- F Harry Nansi

One of the youngest players from the 2025 Draft, Harry Nansi, has had a breakout season for the Owen Sound Attack of the OHL. He has been great on the offensive end of the ice, setting teammates up left and right, while also showing the ability to put the puck in the back of the net when given the chance too.

Production-wise, Nansi topped last season's numbers in 50 fewer games, and has the chance to become a late-round steal for the Maple Leafs after being drafted in the fifth round.

Other standouts: D Ben Danfodt, F Miroslav Holinka, W Alexander Plesovskikh

Utah Mammoth- LW Daniil But

Making his way to the AHL after spending the past two seasons in the KHL, Daniil But has gotten off to a great start with the Tucson Roadrunners, racking up 13 points in his first 14 games in North America,

putting him in the top three among rookies in the entire AHL. After a strong camp with the NHL team this season, it could only be a matter of time before the big 6-foot-6 winger gets a call-up to the league to put his all-around offensive game on display.

Other standouts: C Cole Beaudoin, LW Tij Iginla, C Gabe Smith

Vancouver Canucks- C Braeden Cootes

Another player from the 2025 class who made his way onto an NHL opening-night roster, Braeden Cootes, played only three games with the Canucks before being sent back to the Seattle Thunderbirds of the WHL. Since his return to the Thunderbirds, Cootes has been on a torrid pace offensively, controlling the play whenever he is on the ice and has multiple points in three of his first 11 games, while being held pointless the same amount of times.

His strong start has been headlined by a six-point night in Vancouver, when he put up two goals and four assists on Nov. 8 against the Giants, giving Canucks fans a glimpse of what they could look forward to in the future.

Other standouts: W Gabriel Chiarot, G Alexei Medvedev, C Riley Paterson

Vegas Golden Knights- RW Jakub Ihs-Wozniak

Originally, the choice for the Vegas Golden Knights' biggest standout was Braeden Bowman, but he earned a call-up to the NHL roster and has had a strong start to his career. One of the Golden Knights' 2025 picks has had a strong start back in HockeyAllsvenskan, as Jakub Ihs-Wozniak was loaned back there from the SHL. In his time in the SHL (which lasted 17 games), he did not get a ton of ice time and could not get going offensively.

But since his return to the Sweden's second-tier league, he has found his confidence and game again. Known for his great shot, Ihs-Wozniak has continued to showcase it but has seemed to take more pride in developing his overall game, becoming more involved outside the goal-scoring department.

Other standouts: D Lukas Cormier, C Mateo Nobert, C Alex Weiermair

Washington Capitals- LW Lynden Lakovic

The Washington Capitals continue to find great prospects in the draft, and that continued with the 27th pick in the 2025 Draft, when a player many thought would be gone in the top 15 fell to them, Lynden Lakovic. Lakovic got off to a great start this season with the Moose Jaw Warriors of the WHL and has taken his goal-scoring to another level so far.

He has consistently been the best player on the ice and continues to use his size to his advantage at every turn. As of Nov. 22, he is on a 15-game point streak and has been held off the scoresheet just twice in the first 21 games.

Other standouts: D Cole Hutson, RW Terik Parascak, C Ilya Protas

Winnipeg Jets- LW Viktor Klingsell

After being the best player on the ice at the U20 Nationell level in Sweden, putting up 27 points in just 15 games this season, the real test for Viktor Klingsell will now be seeing how he plays on the big stage of the SHL. So far, he has struggled to get much ice time in two games, seeing under five minutes a night, but the potential is there. If he can continue to play and get more opportunities with Skellefteå AIK, Klingsell's production will go up. Overall, he has been the Jets' most exciting prospect at a high level of hockey to this point this season.

Other standouts: D Edison Engle, LW Kevin He, F Kieron Walton

The League's Future is in Good Hands

While some of the aforementioned prospects are "surprises" to some, many of them have become well-known among fan bases and around the league. Many of these players could end up on the biggest junior international stage in just over a month, representing their countries at the World Junior Championships. It is safe to say the league's future is in good hands with these prospects, among many others, working their way through the ranks as well.